

## Book Reviews

### FAMILIES

**Families Without Hope. A Controlled Study of 33 Problem Families.** By W. L. TONGE, D. S. JAMES and SURAN M. HILLAM. *British Journal of Psychiatry* Special Publication No. 11. Royal College of Psychiatrists. 1975. Pp xi+156. Price £4.00.

This volume represents a welcome new departure in the *British Journal of Psychiatry Special Publications*. For the first time a whole issue is devoted to a single study. There is clearly a place for certain types of investigation being reported in this way when, as here, easy access is needed to a quantity of closely interlocking data.

The problem families studied were all those living in a defined area of Sheffield who had contact with three social agencies or with two agencies one of which was involved in intensive family casework. A comparison group of families was obtained from the same area. All families contained a man and a woman living together and at least one child under the age of 18. The investigators used intensive interviewing, psychological testing and, when indicated, physical examination and inspection of hospital records. Many subjects in the problem group had laboratory tests. Police records and children's school attendance records were also consulted.

The first chapter is devoted to a selected but sensitive review of various concepts related to problem families and poverty. Succeeding chapters group the findings under headings such as 'The Physique and Health of the Parents' or 'The Children and their Social and Developmental Handicaps'. Presentation is aided by histograms in the text and an Appendix of tables. In each chapter data from other relevant studies are compared and discussed.

This investigation provides a useful description of a clearly selected group of families with multiple difficulties who have extensive or intensive contact with social agencies. As such it is a valuable contribution to the literature on problem families. However, it is important to view the findings in the context of other research. A recent review of the cycles of disadvantage (Rutter and Madge, 1976) suggests that 'problem' families are not qualitatively different from families in the general population. This view is supported by the Sheffield study's failure to find a clear typology of problem families.

Several negative results were of particular interest, such as the lack of relationship between child psychiatric disorder and delinquency in the problem family children.

The authors are clearly aware of the difficulties surrounding the assessment of personality disorder and the danger of attributing causal connections in cross-sectional studies. Furthermore, they confess themselves forced by the material to examine social pathology which could not be ascribed to psychiatric disorder. Nevertheless, they place considerable weight on the high rate of personality disorder in the men in the problem families. The reliability of their assessments was not tested, and they themselves comment on the unreliability of retrospective biographical material. Some may feel that interpretation is carried too far by the suggestion that the families were without hope. Depression in the women was no more common than in some urban studies (Brown, Bhrolchain and Harris, 1975) and applied to a minority, albeit a large one. A lack of planning may not always be equivalent to a lack of hope. Rates of psychiatric disorder in the children also compared favourably with one London survey (Rutter *et al*, 1975). This Sheffield research, like other studies of problem families, provokes interest in how individuals in these situations manage to remain psychologically healthy.

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### REFERENCES

- BROWN, G. W., BHROLCHAIN, M. N. & HARRIS, T. (1975) Social class and psychiatric disturbance among women in an urban population. *Sociology*, 9, 225-54.  
RUTTER, M. & MADGE, N. (1976) *Cycles of Disadvantage: a Review of Research*. London: Heinemann.  
— COX, A., TUPLING, C., BERGER, M. & YULE, W. (1975) Attainment and adjustment in two geographical areas: I. The prevalence of psychiatric disorder. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 126, 493-509.

**Principles of Family Psychiatry.** By JOHN G. HOWELLS. New York: Brunner/Mazel. 1975. Pp xiv+464. Index. Price \$17.50.

This book is intended as an outline of principles of family psychiatry, addressed chiefly to the psychiatrist. The author has written extensively in this field, and throughout the book there are recurrent echoes of previous work, principally *Family Psychiatry* (1963)

and *Theory and Practice of Family Psychiatry* (1968). The subject is tackled in an orderly and authoritative way, albeit in a rather prolix, repetitive style. The main sections are concerned with: the anatomy of the family; nosology; psychopathology; diagnosis; therapy; special aspects, such as fathering and childbirth, and the organization of a family psychiatric service. Throughout there is clear evidence of Dr Howells' very extensive clinical experience with disordered families, and this is especially valuable in the sections concerned with treatment and the organization of services. Many interesting references to the practice of the Institute of Family Psychiatry at Ipswich are incorporated.

The rapid growth of family-orientated approaches in psychiatry during the last two decades has highlighted the need to redress the balance of emphasis between intrapersonal and interpersonal phenomena in favour of the latter. Dr Howell's approach to family psychiatry, however, is more far-reaching and is based on his fundamental conviction that psychopathology must always be regarded as an expression of dysfunction in the whole family group. The family, and not the individual, is the patient, and the traditional individual approach is described at one point as often 'nothing but a blundering, stumbling intervention—an elephant in a tea shop'. This point of view shapes all the principles propounded for investigation, diagnosis, therapeutic intervention and the organization of services. The author claims that basic psychopathological processes are best understood in terms of the effects of harmful experiences. It follows that the therapeutic approaches advocated are centred on reversing adverse experiential processes; hence, in Dr Howells' terminology, Benexperiential psychotherapy, Vector therapy, and the creation of a Salutiferous Society. This theoretical framework is emphasized enthusiastically, but little consideration is given to alternative models. For example, there is no discussion of the potential role in family psychiatry of behaviour management skills derived from social learning theory. In this respect, many family-orientated therapists are likely to feel that Dr Howells' conceptual and practical ideas are too restricting and idiosyncratic in a field of work that is still at the pioneering stage. Further, the author holds very personal theoretical ideas about psychiatric nomenclature and nosology, and many new terms are introduced. For example, the terms psychonosis and encephalonosis replace neurosis and psychosis, and schizophrenia, mania and depression are renamed respectively, encephalo-ataxia, encephalolampsia and encephalobarria. While the scope for reconsidering current terminology and classification in psychiatry must be acknowledged, the introduction

of controversial matter of this kind runs the risk of distracting the reader from the main issues of the book. The combined effect of these reservations means that this work is less useful than it should be. It belongs best in the library of the experienced family therapist rather than of the beginner, who requires a more eclectic introduction to the exciting study of the family, family therapy and family research.

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### CHILDREN

**Parent-Infant Interaction.** Ciba Foundation Symposium 33 (New Series). Amsterdam: Associated Scientific Publishers. 1975. Pp vi+324. Index 9 pp. Illustrated. Price \$21.95.

The publication of another book on early parent-child interaction shows that the boom in research into the behaviour and relationships of the neonate continues unabated. Our respect for the newborn baby has had to increase as its ability to actively interact with the outside world has become more apparent. As investigative methods have become more naturalistic, so our knowledge of the complexities of the infants' responses and initiatives has grown dramatically. It is particularly pleasant to realize that much of this work serves to confirm what mothers have often felt about their infants, despite the doubts and scepticism of the experts. In this volume, Brazleton describes the pleasure expressed by mothers when they can see a paediatrician confirm their pride while putting an infant through its paces in a neonatal examination.

This example demonstrates the theme of this volume of the Ciba Foundation Symposium: that present work has reached a point where it is justified to leave the research units and apply some of the established findings to clinical settings. The volume follows the usual symposium pattern of formal research papers followed by an edited account of the ensuing discussions. Such a format can be indigestible, but here the discussions provide a useful and enthusiastic link between the papers. As so many of the comments relate directly to practical issues in paediatrics and psychiatry this volume may be of more than usual interest to clinicians. Only three of the papers are based on non-human investigations, but these are presented in a way that should win over even those most suspicious of the relevance of animal experiments to psychiatry. Particularly impressive is the account by Hinde and Simpson on how a combination of sensitivity and objectivity can be used in primate research to describe and assess various aspects of interpersonal relationships. The remaining 13 papers are based on direct observations